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Commission of Inquiry on U.S. Policy towards Jamaica

U.S. COMMISSION OF INQUIRY TO CALL FOR CONGRESSIONAL INVESTIGATION

EVIDENCE OF U.S. GOVERNMENT INVOLVEMENT IN "DESTABILIZATION" OF JAMAICA

Washington, 23 October 1980. In the spring and summer of 1980, the Commission of Inquiry on U.S. Policy towards Jamaica conducted an investigation into charges that the U.S. government was seeking to "destabilize" the Manley government in Jamaica and to force the ruling People's National Party from office. Members of the Commission began reviewing U.S. relations with Jamaica and the situation on the island itself in May. In August, the Commission went to Jamaica for a five-day fact-finding tour.

The Commission is not yet ready to release a final report. However, an interim report has been prepared, and some members of the Commission consider the findings contained in it to be important. In their judgment these findings should be brought to the attention of the public as soon as possible. They are therefore releasing this statement.

The Commission has arrived at the following findings to date:

1. The U.S. government expressed its strong disapproval of the policies of the present Jamaican government as far back as 1975. At the end of that year, then Secretary of State Kissinger flew to Jamaica to try to persuade Prime Minister Manley to draw back from certain policies to which the U.S. objected. The U.S. was particularly concerned about Jamaica's growing ties to Cuba, the government's attempt to gain control of the bauxite industry, the commitment to Democratic Socialism and to a policy of support for the Non-aligned Movement.

According to one account in 1977 by reporters Ernest Volkman and John Cummings, President Ford, at the urging of Secretary of State Kissinger, authorized the Central Intelligence Agency to carry out a plan of covert action against Jamaica in the fall of 1975. Volkman and Cummings cited "several senior American intelligence sources" for their story. Members of the Jamaican Government told the Commission in August they were certain that the Central Intelligence Agency was involved in an attempt to "destabilize" Jamaica at the time.

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2. As a result of the recent revolutions in Nicaragua and Grenada, and the continuing turmoil in Jamaica, Guyana, El Salvador and Guatemala, the Carter Administration has concluded that there is now a major crisis in the Caribbean. The region has always been of extreme strategic importance to the United States. The U.S. government regards access to the Panama Canal, access to supplies of bauxite and oil and the security of the oil routes across the Caribbean as vital interests. By the late summer of 1979, the U.S. was working to develop a new strategy to cope with what it saw as a mounting danger of radical change in the area.

3. The Carter Administration has launched a new strategy for protecting U.S. interests in the Caribbean. This strategy is a dual one which reflects the different outlooks of the National Security Council and the Department of State. The National Security Council, with the support of the Department of Defense and the Central Intelligence Agency, succeeded in winning approval for a number of political and military measures to strengthen the status quo in the Caribbean. The Department of State assumed responsibility for a policy which would permit the government to influence the directions of change in the area, and in particular to assist the forces of "moderation" in countries where pressures for radical change are increasing.

No comprehensive assessment of the Carter Administration's new and tougher policy for the Caribbean is possible on the basis of the information presently available. It is clear, however, that the harder options which are being kept secret are playing an important role. It is also clear that the new policy includes elements of covert action, as was revealed by the Washington Post on October 9th in its story on the clandestine training of Salvadoran military by U.S. personnel in the Panama Canal Zone.

4. The new policy provides, among other things, for the formation of a high-level inter-agency committee under State Department chairmanship to watch the eastern Caribbean. The committee, which co-ordinates some elements of U.S. policy in the area, includes representatives from the Agency for International Development, the Treasury, the Department of Defense, the Central Intelligence Agency, the Office of Management and Budget, the International Communications Agency and the National Security Council. In addition, this committee was to have a special "sub-group" to watch three particular countries: Jamaica, Guyana and Grenada, because they presented "special problems" which were seen as "particularly aggravated at this time". This special "sub-group" was to assess U.S. policies towards these countries "with a view to undertaking measures to preserve democratic institutions". Almost any measure coming under such a category would involve intervention in the internal affairs of Jamaica.

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5. In 1977, the PNP government in Ja a found it necessary to enter into negotiations with the International Monetary Fund in order to obtain needed foreign exchange. From that time, the IMF became a "major influence in economic decision-making in Jamaica and a major factor in the country's domestic politics", to use the words of the Director of the National Planning Agency. The austerity programs required of Jamaica by the IMF were a dominant factor in undermining the popularity of the present Jamaican government.

The "stabilization programs" insisted upon by the IMF failed to achieve their objectives of stimulating economic growth and closing the payments gap. But they did succeed in drastically reducing the living standards of the majority of Jamaicans, the poor being the greatest losers. The IMF, in which the U.S. government exerts great influence, thus played a significant role in creating political instability in Jamaica.

6. The pattern of events in Jamaica over the last year has been similar to the pattern which occurred in countries actually "destabilized" by the U.S. in the past, such as Chile. The Senate Select Committee on Intelligence (Church Committee) outlined the pattern of covert action in Chile in its 1975 Report. In Chile, the U.S. government helped or persuaded banks, the political opposition, opposition media, terrorist groups, trade unions and middle class and political organizations to take actions which would undermine the Allende government. The results were economic destabilization, labor unrest, strikes, a barrage of anti-government propaganda, partial paralysis of democratic institutions, terrorist violence, anti-government demonstrations and the subversion of the security forces. The same things are all occurring in Jamaica today. And the combined force of these anti-government actions has systematically undermined the authority and the capacity to act of the Jamaican government.

7. Ever since the February announcement of national elections for this October, Jamaica has been caught in rising wave of armed violence. This violence and the deepening economic crisis paved the way for an armed attempt to overthrow the Jamaican government in June. While the opposition press and the U.S. media termed the coup attempt a "comic opera", a non-commissioned officer in the Military Intelligence Unit of the Jamaica Defence Force who had infiltrated the group of conspirators, testified in court in September that the coup attempt had "a 100 per cent chance of success". The coup was thwarted essentially because the JDF had advance warning of the attempt. It should be noted, moreover, that the coup attempt occurred at a time when some reports had predicted something like a coup would take place. In January, Les Payne reported in Newsday that the Carter Administration had decided to force Prime Minister Manley out of office, with a timetable "expiring sometime in June".

8. While the evidence pointing to U.S. intervention in Jamaica cannot at this stage be considered conclusive, it does suggest a strong possibility that the U.S. has been involved in what appears to be "destabilization". Some of the

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concrete indications of U.S. involvement include: the placement of anti-Jamaican propaganda in the U.S. press by Washington officials, contacts of U.S. Embassy personnel in Kingston with the coup conspirators, the increase in the number of personnel at the C.I.A. station in Kingston, the appearance of U.S.-made semi-automatic weapons in large numbers in Jamaica and the attempt by what The Wall Street Journal considered a C.I.A. contract airline to open a service between Philadelphia and Montego Bay in June of this year.

The evidence therefore strongly suggests that the U.S. government may well be engaged in an attempt to "destabilize" Jamaica, and we shall urge fellow members of the Commission to call for a Congressional investigation.

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